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JAPANESE STENCILS.

BY

EDWARD GREEY.

(See illustrations on page 151.)

MANY of the sketchy decorations upon common porcelains, fans, lacquer ware, etc., so much admired by Impressionists, are not hand-painted, but are produced by artistically cut, compound stencils, the number of sheets or "pulls" employed in making a design being as varied as those used in chromo-lithography.

Some stencil makers are accomplished artists, who receive large sums for their wonderful productions, while others, who merely cut geometrical forms in small patterns, work mechanically and earn a mere pittance. The head-quarters of the guild are in Tokio, Sackio, and Osaka, but they can be found all over the Empire, especially in the pottery districts and in places where cheap cotton goods and lacquer ware are manufactured.

During my last visit to Japan I made a large collection of stencils, and spent some time in visiting the shops of the cutters and in watching their method of working.

The men squat behind low benches formed of solid blocks of hard wood about a foot high, resting upon the matted floor. They have no workshops, but carry on their occupations in the rooms in which they live.

A description of a well-known stencil-cutter in Osaka will give a tolerably good idea of how all of them work. The artisan, a middle-aged man, bowed upon my entrance, and after inviting me to a seat upon the mat, remarked:

"I am sorry that you cannot witness cutting by some one more skillful than I am. Such clumsy work as mine will give you but a poor idea of what can be accomplished by the more expert members of our guild, who can cut stencils that will accurately represent a spider's web or the forms of snow crystals."

Producing a drawing in India ink from an envelope lying by his side, he continued:

"This is a commission from a cotton printer and represents water flowing among rocks, with maple leaves floating upon the stream. My patron requires it for a cheap fabric, so only wants two printings."

He placed the picture upon the block before him, covered it with a sheet of tracing paper, and taking up a brush charged with ink, rapidly sketched the outlines of the maple leaves, omiting the veining and the serrated edges. When the tracing was dry, an assistant brought him a sheet of oiled paper about twelve by seventeen inches, laid it upon the block before him, rubbed the under corners of the paper with a little boiled rice and secured it upon the oiled sheet, then bowing, remarked:

"Master, it is ready."

The stencil-cutter took some copper pins from a lacquered box, inserted them in the corners of the sheet, and, having selected a little knife from a number in a box, commenced operations, chatting as he worked:

"These leaves will form the light blue outline of the first printing. I have to be very careful not to cut out certain parts, or the whole design will be spoilt. When I make the tracing for the second sheet, I shall over-lap some portion of the other design in order to produce a third tone; this requires great care and thought."

It took him about fifteen minutes to complete the first sheet of the pattern and over an hour to trace and cut the second sheet that formed the water and rocks and the veinings and outlines of the maple leaves.

He registered the second sheet accurately with the first by means of the pins inserted in his bench, and when the two sheets were completed, placed them one over the other and cut nicks in their upper and lower edges, then, tying them together with a piece of paper string, bowed, and handing them to me, said:

"Please accept this as a specimen of my work, I can cut another set for the cotton printer, after which I shall destroy the copy." (This stencil will be given next month.—Ed.)

I enquired in what manner the cotton printer used the stencils, and was informed that they were required for the purpose of making wood blocks used in printing the fabrics, the stencil being kept to reproduce new cuts when the old ones wore out. I also learned that the patterns were never sold to other manufacturers and, though not protected by copyright, were, by custom of the trade, safe from piracy.

Before leaving I secured a number of sets of compound stencils, that through some caprice of their designers, had been left upon the maker's hands, among them being a very complicated, geometrical design in two sheets, representing bamboo outlines with diapers of pine tree and flowing water. (See opposite page).

"This was made for a crêpe painter," he remarked, "and is for using directly upon the fabric. After the first stencil, with the wavy water lines, is applied, certain portions of the pattern are painted in with different tones of the same color, the second stencil is used, and the entire design gone over with the brush. The crêpe is then dipped in the mordant, when the colors that overlay each other become mixed, making the piece look as though it had been entirely painted by hand."

Nearly all of the multi-colored illustrations in Japanese books, supposed to be kylographs, are really produced by stenciling, some of the pictures requiring twenty separate cards.

AMERICAN ART IN GLASS.

ORNAMENTAL AND USEFUL.

By Frank T. Robinson.

PLINY records that glass was discovered by the Phœnecians, while Perrot (1882) states that the Egyptians, in the time of the first Theban Empire, made glass skins for their pottery, which was long ages before there was a Phœnecian city.

Be this as it may, it is well known that for over twenty-five centuries the glass industry has thrived with unabated success.

The sacred blue glass bracelets of Hebron, the little iridescent vials and vases, earrings and nose-rings, anklets and armlets, the eye of Osiris and other trinkets—all examples of antiquity—show us the subtle handiwork of the master of the craft in its infant days.

We have progressed in facilities and productive power, while we have lost many of their methods of manipulation.

Our country, until within twenty years, produced little or no artistic glass; not because there was no demand for fanciful objects, but on account of the fact that we had not the artistic development and training requisite to compete with the European makers.

To-day, in many specialties, we stand side by side with Belgium, France, Austria, Hungary and Germany.

Tiffany, La Farge and other houses in America rival the French in stained window glass, and some of our manufacturers are making jewels that equal, both in cutting and brilliancy, the German and Venetian products.

Our plate glass makers are making great inroads on the German importations, and all along the line there is evidence of a grand awakening among our manufacturers of fancy and useful glass, insomuch, that where five years ago the duties on imported glass footed up upwards of $15,000,000, there has been a reduction of over twenty-five per cent. on an average up to date.

Our enterprising glass makers have discovered that there is a great demand for artistic glass, that among all classes ornamental glass is salable, and, what at first seemed a difficult problem—the creation by local talent of good glass objects—could be overcome.

Accordingly, capital has been invested, and experiments, many of them very costly, have been made, and to-day, without the assistance of imported skill, we are producing some rare and beautiful works, quite worthy to stand beside the best of modern glass.

The West has its Murano glass makers, who produce the enameling and colors, "the line, spot and ribbon" very well, and in time will succeed in equaling the lightness of the best Venetian ware.

Virginia shows glass work of the metallic flake style that is beautiful in construction and design, and the equal of anything made in Europe.

Massachusetts takes an easy lead in certain specialties, the New England Glass Works, located in East Cambridge, during the past six years having developed into an important manufactory, showing surprising results in the making of ornamental and useful glass objects.

In the metals, small decorative ware can be made in our country as well as in Europe, and this fact is proven by a recent investigation. It seems that we have learned that small objects in iron, brass or copper, artistically constructed, can be made and sold cheaper than they can be produced abroad and imported.

We create new and costly designs in small shapes, and are amply repaid by the quick sales and small profits.

In larger work we are clever imitators, but cannot compete with foreign workmen on original designs, more on account of cheapness of labor abroad than lack of inventive qualities.

In glass it was much the same a half-dozen years ago, but our far-seeing producers discovered that our market would warrant the making of highly adorned glass and pay a good price for it, because the sale for it was rapid. If it were not for the fact that the American public appreciated good artistic glass and bought it so readily, there would be no use in making it, because, no sooner would a good thing of domestic make be shown than it would be quickly reproduced abroad and imported and sold at a lower price than we could make it. Doubtless this acts as an impetus to our manufacturers, as is evidenced by the New England Glass Co. It produced the Amberina glass, now so well known throughout the country, and immediately follow up its success by introducing the "Pomona" glass, which is shaped into many objects and is well worth describing.

Its treatment in no way resembles the new "ice flower glass" of "Erbeus," made near Hergogenrath, Germany. That glass is previously surface-deadened, and covered with a gelatinous mass which dries at ordinary temperature. When exposed to higher temperature, the applied mass endeavors to separate itself from the glass; the force with which it acts and the adhesion of the glass to it being greater than cohesion amongst themselves of the particles of glass, the mass flies off and carries away with it as much as a fiftieth part of an inch in depth of the glass.

The ice-frosted "Pomona" glass, which so closely resembles the "Erbeus," is a species of surface etching, and is the result of electric appliance. There is no caustic action or sand blast, and milk, sugar or wine will show its color through the glass, it thus being in no sense opaque.

The surface is treated in such a manner as to produce feathery forms, ice crystals, and all the effect of the fantastical "Jack Frost" ice tracery. The rays of light are caught and retained, giving an effect on the upper ridges, where the color is of an amber tint, not unlike the wonderful iridescence arising from molecular action of centuries, as seen in the decomposed glass found at Nineveh, Cyprus and other places.

Added to this there are line-engraved daisies, violet forms, vines, leaves, etc., and the petals are treated in a pigeon blue or steel-tempered tint. The center of the daisies are raised and cut in a delicate manner.

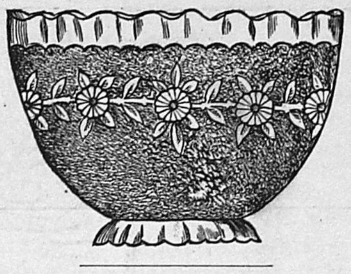
High and low reliefs are obtained when the glass is hot, just the same as the workman fashions the scollop on the edges or any other form.

In the simpler forms, the glass shows off to great advantage, some of the surface adornments resembling the filigree engraving on Moorish silver. Bowls, wine sets, vases, cream and sugar sets and many other exquisite varieties of useful and ornamental objects are made of this glass.

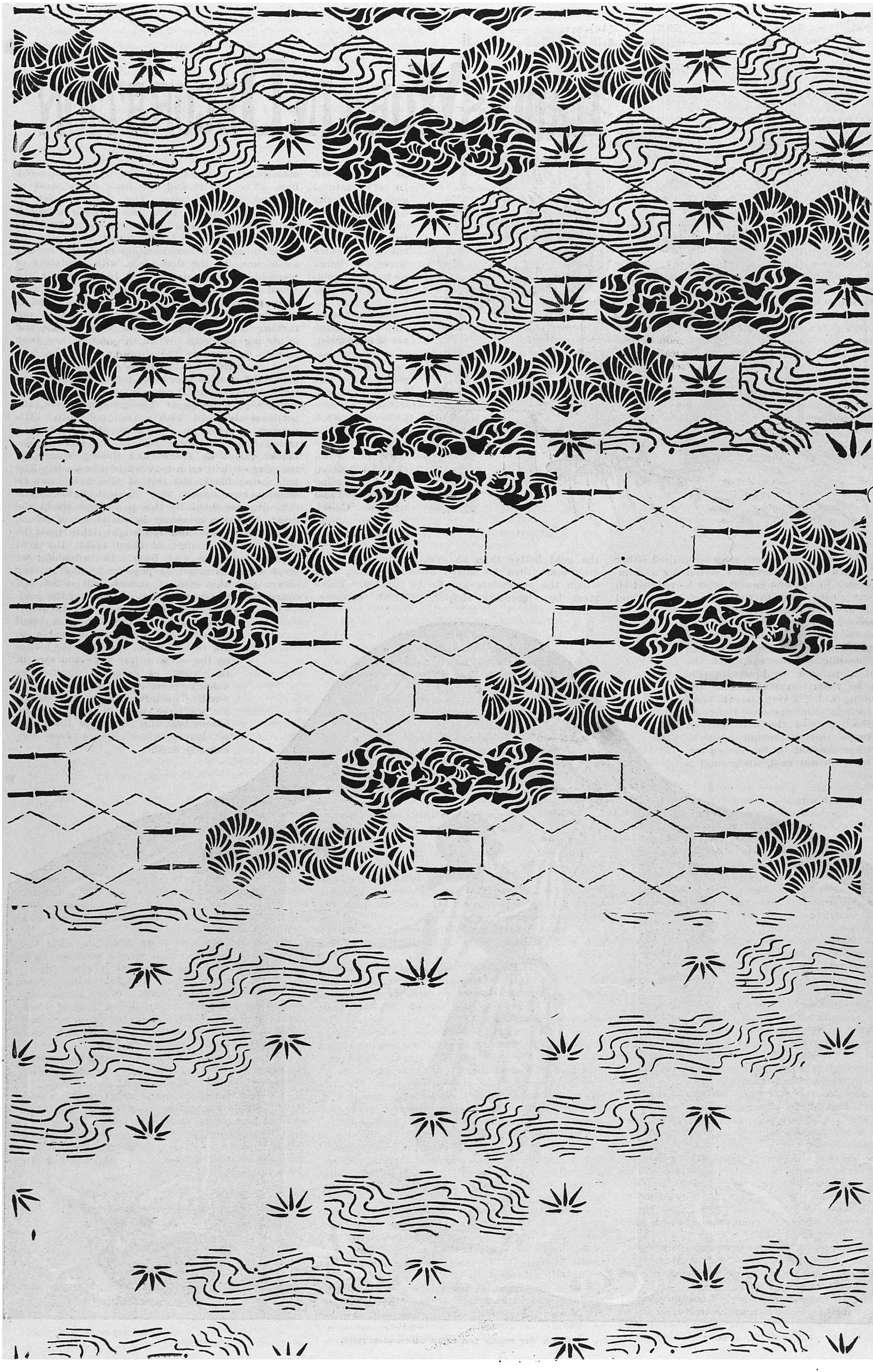
The designs are all new, showing our native resources of invention, and that we are not entirely dependent on the foreigner for ideas.

The tariff does not bother this house, nor does it any other wide-awake and enterprising glass concern in America.

The point of it is that our people love artistic things, and they will as quickly buy the domestic production as the foreign, if it is as good and the price the same.



Loose cushions for lounge chairs or foot stools are made in rich Oriental style.



No. 3, Combination of the Two.

No. 2, Second Stencil.

No. 1, First Stencil.

Japanese Stencil made up of two parts. No. 1, First Stencil; No. 2, Second Stencil; No. 3, Combination of the Two.